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In Search of Spiritual Capital: the Spiritual as a Cultural Resource

Mathew Guest

Introduction: The Problem of the ‘Spiritual’

Definitions of spirituality are notoriously slippery. However, understandings have in recent times achieved some clarity and consensus among scholars. The spiritual is associated with the personal, the intimate, the interior and the experiential, contrasted with ‘religion’, which is associated with the official, the external and the institutional, often picking up negative connotations of the hierarchical and patriarchal along the way (Heelas, 2002). Acknowledging the word’s many connotations, Wade Clark Roof isolates four as being most important, focusing on spirituality as “a source of values and meaning beyond oneself, a way of understanding, inner awareness, and personal integration.” (Roof, 1999: 35) ‘Spirituality’ has been invoked in this way to articulate dissatisfaction with mainstream religious traditions and to signal an attempt to move beyond their limitations. This is the rhetoric used within discussions of the ‘New Age’ movement, focussed on inner-transformation and the holistic, spiritual healing of the self. However, this language also lends itself to descriptions of mysticism, and of the more experiential dimensions of mainstream religion. While located within various contexts, spirituality is increasingly associated with aspects of religiosity focused on the experiential, the interior, and generally the subjective dimensions of personal identity.

Within the contemporary context, it is sometimes argued that the spiritual is replacing the religious, as a more meaningful expression of identity for many people living within advanced post-industrial societies. In support of this, recent research has revealed that a focus on the subjective is not restricted to alternative or New Age enclaves; many mainstream churches in the UK and USA are placing a fresh emphasis upon connecting with the inner lives of members, upon affirming their subjective lives rather than stressing a need for conformity to an externalised body of truth (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Miller, 1997). Hence the popularity of charismatic megachurches, inner city Pentecostalism, Christian retreat centres and the kabala branch of Jewish mysticism. All place a premium on personal experience and the spiritual dimensions of the inner life. The argument here is that as contemporary western society places an increasing emphasis upon the cultivation of the subjective self – on catering to the emotional, intuitive, interior dimensions of identity - so religious traditions are evolving so as to meet these needs. On this understanding, late modernity is the age of the spiritual, rather than the religious.

Studies that highlight the importance of subjective spirituality draw our attention to some important dimensions of the contemporary religious landscape. They move the analysis beyond church and chapel, shifting our focus to the boundaries of the religious mainstream and beyond. However, they often highlight the individualistic aspects of spirituality at the expense of the social, the subjective at the expense of the inter-subjective. Existing treatments have been driven largely by what Steven Tipton

(1982) calls “expressive individualism”, that is, a model that conceives religious identity as shaped by the subjective experiences of individuals. Indeed, this is a fair description of many post-1960s religious movements, such as charismatic renewal, the Jesus Army, and the ‘soft’ capitalism of courses such as *est*. However, while “expressive individualism” captures the fact that subjective experience feeds a sense of spiritual identity, it does not account for the complex exchange of resources that underlies this process. Charismatic Christians do not simply draw from their experience as raw data in forging a sense of meaning out of life; their experience is filtered, interpreted, expressed, re-expressed, and negotiated in dialogue with a received set of traditions alongside conventions of authority and acceptability. Their ‘spirituality’ is shaped by an interactive process, set within a complex network of relationships. It draws on cultural resources which are deployed and negotiated, not merely absorbed. In sum, spirituality is not the preserve of autonomous individuals; it is subject to a broader social distribution of power.

In support of this argument, we recall James Beckford’s insightful comment that religion is not being eclipsed by the forces of contemporary society, as the hard-line secularisation theorists would have us believe. Rather, religion has undergone a change in form: it has ceased to function primarily as a social institution, and is now better conceived as a ‘cultural resource’:

“Religion has come adrift from its former points of anchorage but is no less potentially powerful as a result. It remains a potent cultural resource or form which may act as the vehicle of change, challenge or conservation. Consequently, religion has become less predictable. The capacity to mobilize people and material resources remains strong, but it is likely to be mobilized in unexpected places and in ways which may be in tension with ‘establishment’ practices and public policy.” (Beckford, 1989: 170)

David Lyon (2000) endorses Beckford’s analysis, arguing that in late modernity, religion has become ‘deregulated’, free to take on new forms and occupy novel spaces in ways that demand a fresh approach to the sociology of contemporary religious phenomena. Such an approach would do well to take account of the transition of religion into spirituality – that is, into more subjectivised forms, but it would also need to account for the ways in which this spirituality functions as a cultural resource.

It is the aim of this chapter to explore the possibilities of analysing spirituality in these terms, through the notion of ‘spiritual capital’, that is: as a cultural resource to be acquired and exchanged. The introduction of ‘spiritual capital’ as a theoretical tool in the sociology of religion is contentious, not least because the use of the word ‘spiritual’ is suggestive of theological discourse. This implies, for some, a quasi-confessional approach lacking in sociological rigour. Furthermore, to approach religion in terms of capital is to venture into relatively uncharted waters. Much of the literature takes as its central theoretical focus the institution or the individual, and by comparison ‘capital’ appears somewhat elusive and ambiguous to say the least. However, it is our strong conviction that to approach religious phenomena in terms of ‘spiritual capital’ carries important advantages. Most clearly, it allows us to shed new light on the nature of religion as a cultural resource in late modernity, and in so doing facilitates a more accurate sociological analysis of spirituality, and of spiritual identity.

Some authors have already attempted to conceptualise ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual capital’. In so doing, they build on a long tradition within which ‘capital’ has been deployed as a metaphor for mobilisable resources. Consequently, an examination of the theoretical possibilities of spiritual capital demands a consideration of this tradition, and this will proceed in the following section. This will be followed by a discussion and development of religious and spiritual capital, drawing particularly from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The final section will explore and develop the proposed theory of spiritual capital by addressing its application within the context of a specific research project, exploring the process of value transmission among the families of Anglican clergymen.

The Development of ‘Capital’ as a Theoretical Tool

While it has an earlier history, most contemporary understandings of ‘capital’ owe their greatest conceptual debt to Karl Marx, who published his monumental critique of political economy, *Capital*, in three volumes between 1867 and 1894 (Marx, 1970). Seeking to identify the processes at the heart of capitalist economics, Marx uses capital as a dynamic metaphor for the fluid entity that, by virtue of its circulation, accrues material value. He distinguishes between “fixed capital” – that which is tied up in plant and equipment – and “circulating capital”, which turns over more rapidly in production, such as wages or the value of raw materials (Foley, 1986: 45). However, capital is not merely defined by the material in which it is embodied (e.g. money, commodities); rather, it has value by virtue of the fact “that it is involved in a particular process, the process of producing surplus value.” (Brewer, 1984: 35). Moreover, while inextricably linked to - and generated by - capitalist society, Marx insisted that capital be seen not as a concrete entity, but as a socio-economic relation. It is this, more abstract, dimension, together with its metaphorical connotations of exchange and circulation, which has shaped the multiple development of ‘capital’ as a social scientific reference to *mobilisable resources*. Indeed, it has acquired a variety of qualifying prefixes throughout the twentieth century:¹ we speak of academics deploying ‘intellectual capital’, the aristocracy benefiting from their ‘cultural capital’, government ministers trading ‘political capital’ for reasons of personal advancement or as leverage in policy debates. In this sense ‘capital’ has in some ways fallen foul of the same indiscriminate deployment as ‘spirituality’, and risks losing all force as a conceptual tool. However, its development has not been entirely capricious, and it is possible to trace a coherent and rich conceptual history by appealing to the work of several key authors.

One of the first major embellishments emerged as ‘human capital’ in the 1960s. Economist and latterly Nobel Prize winner Gary Becker (1964) used this term to develop a theory that explained the relationship between education and family upbringing to a person’s capacity to excel in the job market. In this sense, ‘human capital’ refers to resources which reside in human beings, rather than in plant or machinery. Becker retained Marx’s concern for resources that can be traded for economic gain, but broadened the possibilities of capital by acknowledging the integral role that learnt behaviour can play in generating material advantages and disadvantages. Human capital has continued to be used in this sense, remaining particularly popular in the discipline of economics.

Robert Putnam claims the term ‘social capital’² was coined independently at least six times during the twentieth century. Put to theoretical use in such varied fields as education and economics, it has always referred to “the ways in which our lives are made more productive by social ties.” (Putnam, 2000: 19) Pierre Bourdieu, whose work reflects the dominant understanding, first developed the term within the sociology of education during the 1970s (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1980; 1985). Bourdieu refers to the resources linked to a “durable network” of relationships (1985: 248), thus defining social capital - as Becker had with ‘human capital’ - in functional terms, as a means to an end, this end often expressed as material or economic gain (see also Loury, 1981).

James Coleman (1990; 2000) continued in this vein, speaking of social capital as a resource generated between individuals. His work carries us further, however, setting social capital within a sophisticated theoretical framework for understanding human action more generally. Coleman argues that whereas sociologists have traditionally tended to see human behaviour as moulded by rules and norms, structures in which individuals are embedded, economists have presented humans as autonomous agents who construct their own opportunities and forge their own values. For Coleman, social capital serves as a meso-level concept that captures the constraining and yet at the same time empowering capacity of social relationships. In this way he echoes Bourdieu, who operationalises ‘capital’ as a dynamic motif intended to overcome the dichotomy between objectivism – the tendency to explain human action purely in terms of social structures - and subjectivism - the tendency to account for behaviour in terms of human agency alone (Jenkins, 1992: 74). In this way, both Bourdieu and Coleman use social capital to advance and refine wider debates in social theory.

Robert Putnam is the name which is now most readily associated with social capital. His monumental study *Bowling Alone* (2000) charts the decline of community participation across US culture during the latter half of the twentieth century. Putnam’s emphasis upon social capital as the ‘connective tissue’ which holds society together, conjoined with his pessimistic prognoses, have lent his work something of a political edge, and have secured it a broad audience, from academic scholars to government policy makers. His work is not as theoretically ambitious as that of Coleman or Bourdieu, but he has done more than anyone to popularise the term and set it within the context of broader questions pertinent to late modern society. Most clearly, he has established the sense that social capital - connections among individuals - is a social good, a potent commodity within an age of hyper-individualism and consumer culture. He emphasises human relationships as potential reservoirs of power and the key to social improvement, and associates social capital with norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness, arguing that it is closely related to what many have called ‘civic virtue’, “most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations” (Putnam, 2000: 19).

Putnam’s theoretical innovation is his distinction between *bridging* and *bonding* forms of social capital. Bonding social capital builds up connections between members of a group, and hence strengthens social cohesion. Bridging social capital links individuals within different social groups, thus generating wider networks of reciprocity. The former is what under girds the collective identities of marginalized groups, while the latter is what may enable the members of those groups to overcome

their marginalized status (Putnam, 2000: 22-24). Though the relationship between these two types is complex, Putnam's distinction does highlight some moral issues raised by the social capital debate, some of which he deals with in a chapter on the "dark side of social capital". For example, while bonding social capital may lie at the heart of the black protest against apartheid, the same kinds of social forces drove the passion of the Ku Klux Klan.

We must return to Pierre Bourdieu in outlining the meaning of 'cultural capital', which he has developed alongside economic, social and symbolic capital as elements in the wider social field. To expand, in Bourdieu's framework for understanding society, a social field is a structured system of positions. These positions, and the relationships that pertain between them, are determined by the distribution of various resources, or forms of capital. Bourdieu distinguishes between economic capital (material resources and wealth), social capital (significant relationships between individuals), symbolic capital (accumulated prestige or honour), and cultural capital. The latter features heavily in Bourdieu's work, particularly in discussions of the generation and maintenance of power in society. In its simple usage it refers to skills and knowledge, acquired through education, which can be used to acquire jobs, money and status. However, Bourdieu deploys 'cultural capital' in a more complex fashion, to capture the ways in which the very minutiae that make up the social identities of the social elite are recognised as indicative of value and currency, so that the dominant social classes are able to sustain their dominant status.

This is most eloquently expressed in Bourdieu's essay on the transmission of social values, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction" (1977a). Here he takes the example of the French education system to demonstrate how conventions of assessment and the discernment of academic ability work to the advantage of particular social groups. Bourdieu expands, commenting that only particular social classes generally acquire the cultural dispositions required to excel in the academic world, because of the process of the reproduction of cultural capital, advanced by "familiarization, i.e. imperceptible apprenticeships from the family upbringing, which is the mode of acquisition of the instruments of appropriation of the dominant culture of which the dominant classes hold the monopoly." (1977a: 495) Moreover, by concealing these mechanisms, the education system legitimates them, and ensures their future success (1977a: 496).

For Bourdieu then, cultural capital is an acquired set of resources – knowledge and skills, but also the behavioural and stylistic conventions attached to them – which serve as a means to achieving, or maintaining, social status. His Marxist leanings are evident in his argument that cultural capital is essentially used by the elite strata of society to maintain their position and, by implication, to constrain others from usurping them from it. In this sense, 'capital' is appropriated and developed in a manner that carries moral, as well as political, implications, built on an analysis of social power and its associated inequalities. For our present discussion, Bourdieu's work is also important insofar as it highlights the ways in which certain forms of capital may be converted into others – education (cultural capital) into employment (economic capital), association with other elites (social capital) into prestige and status (symbolic capital). In this respect, he maps out a theoretical scheme that draws attention to the complex processes of interaction and exchange that shape the distribution of power in society. Moreover, he demonstrates how experiences at one

point in a person's life-course can have a shaping influence upon their advancement at later stages, in very different social spheres. In this respect, he lays the theoretical foundations for an analysis of 'spiritual careers', shaped by the variety and availability of a range of resources drawn upon in the ongoing process of identity formation.

'Capital' has enjoyed a rich history of development that has bequeathed the social sciences with a wealth of theoretical insight. In reaction to Marxian economics, human capital has been presented as a broad concept, intended to capture the non-material aspect of the production process. It incorporates all kinds of human skills and experience that may be theorised as resources likely to confer benefits upon the individual who holds them, benefits that are often presented as economic reward. Social and cultural capital, while variously conceived, refer to specific sub-species of human capital, and their particular definition makes for more nuanced analyses of human action and opportunity. Furthermore, theoretical subtlety has been accompanied by moral critique, with scholars like Bourdieu and Putnam using 'capital' not only to trace patterns of human empowerment, but also to highlight social inequalities and developments perceived as detrimental to the social good. It is against the background of this theoretical canvas that, in recent years, notions of religious and spiritual capital have emerged.

From 'Religious' to 'Spiritual' Capital

While some studies have sought to shed light on religious behaviour by using an existing 'capital' framework – e.g. by using Becker's notion of 'human capital' to shed light on issues relating to religious participation (Iannaccone, 1990; Neuman, 1986) – others have responded to the specific challenges of religion by proposing a fresh theory of 'religious' or 'spiritual' capital. In these cases, it is assumed, religion presents such a novel construction and distribution of power that it demands its own nomenclature, i.e. it is impossible to truly capture its distinctiveness using the existing concepts of human, social or cultural capital. Again, Pierre Bourdieu is the theorist who has done most to initiate a discussion of a distinctive 'religious capital'.

Throughout his vast corpus of publications, Bourdieu repeatedly conceptualises resources as 'capital' – whether economic, social, cultural or symbolic – as a way of expressing how they function as objects of struggle. 'Capital' is valued because it is comparatively scarce, and individuals and groups compete for it as part of their broader quest for power and legitimation within the social fields in which they find themselves. In only a handful of articles does Bourdieu concern himself with religion (e.g. Bourdieu, 1987; 1991b). He is heavily indebted to Max Weber in these pages, particularly in adopting an essentially economic model in understanding religion (Weber, 1978). Consequently, he goes to some lengths in describing the 'resources' at stake in the 'religious field'. These are "the legitimation of the social order, the sanction of wealth and power, and the sense of meaning that religion brings to people's lives." (Rey, 2004: 337) In associating such wide-ranging themes with religious capital, Bourdieu is expressing his argument that networks of power often occupy overlapping social fields, so that a position of dominance in the world of finance, for example, may draw in part from symbolic capital accumulated in the fields of culture or religion. An example may be the historical complicity of the

Church of England with the institutions of the British state, or the close relationship between Roman Catholicism and political elites in the South American nations. Both reflect cases of religion achieving dominance through strategic political affiliations, and of political hegemonies using the symbols and language of religious tradition as a means of sustaining legitimacy and respectability. Indeed, one of Bourdieu's key claims about religious capital is that religious specialists - and the elites aligned with them - use religion to veil the arbitrary nature of the unjust social order that they represent. By associating themselves with religious institutions, the ruling classes create the illusion that they are themselves religious and moral, and therefore are deserving of their power (Bourdieu, 1977b: 183). In this way, the existing social order is religiously sanctioned and those who occupy positions of dominance maintain their privileged status.

This is Bourdieu at his most Marxist, and his argument is in this sense hardly novel, the association of religion with ruling class interests being well known and well rehearsed. However, Bourdieu takes his argument further, identifying what he sees as distinctive about a specifically 'religious' form of capital. This is partly to do with the esoteric or secret knowledge he sees as the preserve of the official priesthood. It is access to this knowledge that distinguishes those who have a monopoly on religious capital from those who are subject to the power that this monopoly invests. Bourdieu expands on the structure of this power in his distinction between 'practical mastery' and 'knowledgeable mastery'. 'Practical mastery' amounts to schemes of thinking and action acquired by familiarisation - i.e. through experience rather than explicit teaching. It is therefore common to all members of a group, who apply this mastery in the prereflexive mode. 'Knowledgeable mastery' is a body of knowledge, systematized and taught through a specialist institution, such as, in the Christian context, a theological training college. These institutions are mandated to produce and reproduce religious capital as a knowledge and competence that sustains the distinction between priest and laity (Bourdieu, 1991b: 10). Consequently, while Bourdieu allows for some complexity in the distribution of religious power - in his acknowledgement of the broader availability of 'practical mastery' - his analysis is still predominantly shaped by a sharp distinction between religious specialists and those they purport to serve. The distinctive aspect of this dimension of 'religious capital' relates to how this coveted knowledge is linked to what Bourdieu calls the 'goods of salvation'. For Bourdieu (1987:132f.; 1991b: 15f.), the goods of salvation are most obviously the sacraments, but they may also refer to a form of recognised membership of a church. Broadly speaking, they are *the resources deemed by a religious tradition to be requisite to salvation*. The nature of these 'goods', according to Bourdieu, is controlled by religious specialists, and articulated fully only in the esoteric preserve of knowledgeable mastery. In this respect, religious capital is distinctive in expressing the means to making life meaningful in ultimate terms; it is for this reason, also, that it is so precious and so coveted by ruling powers.

Bourdieu's understanding of religious capital is not without its problems. Not least, it is shaped by a particular appropriation of French Roman Catholicism, specifically in its conceptual organisation around the priest/laity distinction. His treatment is therefore limited, not least as it advances a conceptual scheme that is only applicable to a narrow range of contexts. An uncritical application of Bourdieu's model to non-Christian or indeed non Roman Catholic contexts would risk serious misrepresentation of the phenomena under study.³ The argument for the complicity of

ruling powers with the religious elite is difficult to sustain in heavily secularised cultures, such as those of late modern western Europe. His focus on networks of power also means that Bourdieu's analysis, while illuminating on the broader – perhaps global – canvas, is of limited utility when addressing bounded communities like denominations or congregations (Rey, 2004: 340). However, the most serious criticisms which may be levelled at Bourdieu's framework relate to its inability to cope with the complexities of the contemporary religious landscape, including the expansion of religion into a more detraditionalised spirituality.

Bourdieu presents religious power in essentially dualistic terms, as a struggle between priesthood and laity, thus making little room for a more complex distribution of resources. As David Lyon argues, our contemporary age leaves the religious realm increasingly deregulated, so that processes of identity formation are less constrained by older organisations and individuals are able to “seek their own meaning routes through the postmodern maze.” (Lyon, 2000: 42) This context of deregulation has generated numerous fresh configurations of religious meaning, so that traditional groups and organisations are increasingly open to or at least available for re-appropriation and reinvention in accordance with the subjective predilections of individuals. The reclamation of Celtic traditions by New Agers, and the growth in syncretistic new religious movements are just two examples. Traditional Christian ideas are also being reinterpreted and reconfigured in light of changing cultures and the changing perceptions of those within them. For instance, in the UK, USA and Australasia, networks emerging from the margins of the evangelical tradition have explored new forms of community organisation and corporate identity – as they put it, new ways of “being church” – that reflect their equally experimental approach to prayer, ritual and collective worship (Guest and Taylor, 2006). Within such a context, the sources of spiritual significance are not restricted by the boundaries of traditional religious hierarchies, but are more freely available within a complex matrix of exchange. As Verter comments on Bourdieu's approach:

“...this model treats religion as an institution but not as a disposition, as an intricate system of coercion but not as a liquid species of capital. In short, it employs categories that are too rigid to account for the fluidities of today's spiritual marketplace.” (Verter, 2003: 151)

As a consequence of his emphasis upon the dominant position of the priesthood, Bourdieu also leaves little room for the empowered lay religious agent. The religious identity of the individual is always constrained by the fact that religious capital is controlled by religious institutions and those who represent them. Recent studies of religion in the contemporary west have increasingly used the language of consumerism, with individuals presented as religious consumers, empowered to construct reflexively their own identities within a detraditionalised context. We might go further, and speak of ‘spiritual entrepreneurs’, those innovators engaged in the creation of fresh religious forms, and we only need think of the explosion of religion on the world wide web to appreciate the opportunities in this field, both reactionary and subversive. Finally, the power that Bourdieu invests in the hegemonies of the church depends in large part on their control of religious capital in the form of esoteric knowledge. Given the deregulated exchange of information and cultural resources in late modernity – bolstered by accelerated globalisation – it is difficult to sustain such a notion. The knowledge that was once the preserve of elites is now

widely available, at least throughout the advanced economies of the west. Power has become more complex, and can no longer be conceived as purely grounded in ownership and control of esoteric knowledge. The empowerment of the late modern individual simply precludes this notion, traditionally conceived.

It is important to stress that these criticisms do not seek to advocate a radical subjectivisation thesis, that presents the individual reflexively constructing his or her own spiritual identity free from any external constraint (Giddens, 1991). No, religious or spiritual capital is best presented as subject to collective boundaries, but if an abstract collective metaphor is appropriate, then it is not the congregation, organisation, denomination or church, so much as the network. Indeed, in late modernity, the relationship between religion and locality is contentious at the very least. In a context characterised by social uprootedness, selective and temporary community allegiance, and 'glocalisation', religious identities are more likely to be sustained by discrete networks, forged throughout the lifecourse in accordance with individual tastes and lifestyles (Hirst, 2003). Indeed, Putnam's 'bonding' and 'bridging' forms of social capital may provide one way into this problem, highlighting as they do the complex ways in which reciprocal relations both reinforce collective boundaries and generate fresh interactive networks, both of which provide a context of exchange for emerging forms of 'spiritual capital'.

This more open conception of religious resources, allowing for a more deregulated exchange and the empowerment of individuals, may go some way towards overcoming the shortcomings of Bourdieu's presentation of religious capital. In reflection of the recent popularity of endeavours into things 'spiritual', a few authors have already begun to use the term 'spiritual capital',⁴ although they differ in what they mean by this. For example, it is used within two of the most well-known and influential recent discussions of religious life in the contemporary USA: Wade Clark Roof's *Spiritual Marketplace* (1999) and Nancy Ammerman's *Congregation and Community* (1997), although in both books, 'spiritual capital' is not defined, nor is it even mentioned outside of the titles of concluding sections. This reflects the ambiguous utility of the term 'spirituality': it is a useful category in a context that shies away from pinning down religious phenomena with clear-cut definitions.⁵

A more fruitful way forward may be found in a theoretically sophisticated discussion of 'spiritual capital', published by US-based sociologist, Bradford Verter. Verter (2003) acknowledges the problems that were earlier identified in Bourdieu's model of religious capital, but he finds enough in Bourdieu's later writings that allow a refinement of this model into a more subtle and multi-dimensional theory, which he calls 'spiritual capital'. Verter's starting point is to acknowledge the deregulated religious marketplace and the fluid nature that religion takes on as it functions as a cultural resource within this context:

"Thus, if religious capital is conceived à la Bourdieu as something that is produced and accumulated within a hierocratic institutional framework, spiritual capital may be regarded as a more widely diffused commodity, governed by more complex patterns of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption." (Verter, 2003: 158)

Seeking to distance himself from the work of Stark and Finke (2000), which relies heavily on rational choice theory, Verter does not wish to imply that spiritual capital operates within a 'free market'. As he comments, there is no fixed scale in the cultural field, "competitors do not enjoy equal advantages" (2003: 158). Rather, in keeping with his theoretical indebtedness to Bourdieu, Verter acknowledges that individuals occupy positions of relative strength or weakness, depending on the capital one possesses, and on one's relationship to the processes that shape the distribution of that capital. In other words, spiritual capital is not simply accumulated in proportion to individual effort; its relative distribution is influenced by existing structures of power (Swartz, 1996: 78).

Drawing from Bourdieu's classification of cultural capital, Verter distinguishes between three different forms of spiritual capital: the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalised state (Bourdieu, 1985). The *embodied* state refers to the personal disposition made up of a collection of knowledge, tastes, and other resources an individual amasses throughout their experience, inculcated through education or a process of unconscious socialisation. It is a form of spiritual capital embodied in what Bourdieu calls the 'habitus', "the socially structured mode of apprehending and acting in the world." (Verter, 2003: 159) In the *objectified* state, spiritual capital appears as material and symbolic commodities, including theological knowledge and ideology. If the embodied state refers to embodied processes of consumption, the objectified state refers to what is consumed. The two are intimately related, not least because it is often necessary to possess certain knowledge before one knows how to properly consume or appropriate spiritual capital. An example would be the act of taking Eucharist in an Anglican Church, which involves an intricate range of learnt behaviours as well as responses to liturgy, and an acquired body of knowledge drawn upon in interpreting and affirming the significance of the event. Finally, spiritual capital exists in an *institutionalised* state in the power religious organisations possess in determining the meaning of and access to the 'goods of salvation'. It is in its institutionalised state that spiritual capital is most clearly visible and demarcated.

Verter's understanding of 'spiritual capital' retains Bourdieu's sensitivity to power relations as well as his Weberian tendency to always seek out the complex relationships between religious phenomena and the non-religious forces that infuse them. However, he adapts Bourdieu's work to the late modern context, re-conceiving spiritual capital as a fluid, multi-faceted phenomenon, emerging from a variety of sources and taking on a variety of forms as it is actively negotiated within the lives of individuals, and amongst the networks in which they are active. His distinction between the embodied, objectified and institutional states illustrates how spiritual capital takes on numerous forms and suggests some arguments for how it may lend itself to being converted into other forms of capital. For example, spiritual capital may be vested in a position of institutional advantage – that of a senior cleric or religious official, perhaps – which is used to acquire symbolic capital or prestige. Or it may be identified in objectified religious knowledge, perhaps acquired through specialised training, which is later mobilised in a broader arena as cultural capital. In this Verter offers a sophisticated scheme that is rich in theoretical insight and multifaceted in its scope.

Following this extended theoretical preamble, it is now possible to explore some of the heuristic advantages of this concept of 'spiritual capital' by putting it to use within

a particular case study. The research addressed below is appropriate to the purposes of this essay, as it highlights both the fluidity of spiritual resources and their propensity to be converted into other forms of capital under certain conditions. The research is into the children of senior Anglican clergymen, and presents spiritual capital as a powerful but ambiguous entity, diffusing outwards from the central hierarchies of the church, through the families of its leaders and into the wider world. In this sense it becomes a dynamic metaphor for the resources transmitted across generations.

Spiritual Capital and Clergy Children: A Case Study

From 2001 until 2004, Douglas Davies and myself conducted the ‘Clergy and British Society’ project, tracing the lives and influence of senior Anglican clergy from 1940 to 2000 (Davies and Guest, 2006). A major part of this project concerned the adult children of these now retired Church of England bishops, their careers and religious convictions, focussing upon the extent to which they have taken on the values affirmed by and in their childhood clerical homes. Callum Brown, in his important rethinking of the secularisation problem, *The Death of Christian Britain* (2001), rightly emphasises the family as a key factor in determining the fate of Christianity as a significant social force. Further research has reaffirmed the importance of the family as an enduring shaping influence over the values individuals profess in adulthood (Bengtson, Biblarz and Roberts, 2002). We do not exist as isolated late modern individuals, but within persistent networks - of family, friends and colleagues - that continue to shape our identities. In light of these findings, we asked whether there are patterns in the acceptance, rejection and evolution of values learnt through being a member of a senior clergyman’s family.

These questions are easily reformulated in terms of spiritual capital: its generation, transmission, maintenance and evolution in different contexts. Indeed, one might see this project as a natural development of Bourdieu’s work, especially given his pre-occupation with the religious capital vested in ecclesiastical hegemonies, and his own jointly authored study of power struggles among French bishops (Bourdieu and Saint Martin, 1982). However, we also move beyond Bourdieu’s study, which examined the lives of celibate Roman Catholic bishops, by exploring how spiritual capital is passed on *via* the families of clergy who are married with children. Moreover, Bourdieu’s focus was upon how power is controlled and restricted by religious hierarchies; our own concern has been with how the cultural resources nurtured by and around these hierarchies are transmitted outwards, through the next generation and into the wider social world. Our assumption here is that the family may serve not just as an enduringly influential shaper of social values, but also as a significant factor in the empowerment of individuals, who acquire stocks of capital by virtue of their upbringing – Bourdieu’s ‘familiarisation’ - and through experiences and associations brought about through family roles and personal connections.

The project involved two major research techniques, developed with specific aims and objectives in mind. The need to gauge the demographic background and religious and career trajectories of respondents meant that a questionnaire survey was necessary, and we received detailed questionnaire responses from 225 individuals, including retired Anglican bishops, their wives and their adult offspring. The further need for a detailed examination of how bishops, their wives and children make sense of their

identities in relation to the spiritual capital of the Church of England required extended interviews, and we conducted 51 recorded, semi-structured conversations with a sample from among our survey respondents. These allowed us to examine how these individuals currently reflect on their experiences as members of a clergy family, on family life, its peculiarities, benefits and problems, and how these relate to the subsequent development of outlooks and values which have become pertinent in the emergence of professional and religious identities. While we are enquiring about specific historical events and experiences, we have been asking individuals to recount them often many years after these events took place, and therefore through the inevitable filters of time and subsequent life experience. As such, we are not seeking to uncover causal historical relationships or determinative trends in generational value transmission. While our questionnaire data allows us to place our findings within a solid historical, ecclesiastical and cultural context, our interest has been primarily in the narrative and subjective construction of spiritual capital by the individuals who have taken part in our study.

Our analysis of questionnaire and interview data revealed that the experience of life within the clerical home – for the majority a vicarage, and later the bishop's residence – could be seen as the axis from which orientations towards religion and professional life later emerged. It was this experience that served as a persistent reference point for clergy children as they sought to make sense of their current attitudes to these topics. We found that it was indeed possible to describe the most dominant characteristics of this upbringing in the clergy home using a capital framework. For example, while Anglican bishops are not paid high salaries, they are often accorded a sizeable and sometimes rather opulent residence, a luxury that was associated by their children with material comfort and a sense of status. Significant cultural capital was channelled into family life through the educational advantages enjoyed by the bishop, and often his wife also, and these advantages were often perpetuated by sending their children to prestigious schools, sometimes supported by a bursary for clerical children. In some cases, intellectual discussion of current affairs was introduced into family life so that their children entered adulthood with a distinctive theological and moral literacy. Of course, regular practical involvement in church life and liturgy also invested a certain 'embodied knowledge', augmenting this stock of what Bourdieu might call 'practical mastery' of a particular Christian tradition. The prestige and social standing vicariously accorded by virtue of their father's position also proved in some cases to be a valued source of symbolic capital, and the social capital accumulated through the bishop's local and national contacts appears to have secured some opportunities later in life. If there are advantages to be gained through having a familial connection to the spiritual elite, they are many and complex.

All of these forms of capital were channelled through and influenced by the clergy household, and recalled as positive and empowering experiences by the clergy children we spoke to. However, many facets of this experience also have a negative side. The moral and spiritual standing accorded to the father, for example, was often projected on to his children in a way that fostered unfair behavioural expectations, both at school where the vicar or bishop was sometimes well known, and in the parish, where the status of the 'clergy child' comes with an ambiguous set of associations. Some clergy children also felt that their individual spiritual identity was diminished because it was always perceived in relation to their father's status. This was not helped for some by the deferential behaviour of churchgoers towards the

bishop, often perceived as confusing spirituality with hierarchical status, vestments and titles. Most striking, perhaps, were the ways in which the experiences of the clerical home were recalled, an emphasis placed on how it was predominantly a focus for the pastoral care of outsiders. This was recalled positively by some – as a model of altruism to be emulated later in life – but thoroughly negatively by others, who resented the fact that their needs always seemed to come second to the parish, that their father was often absent, and that the private boundaries of their home were frequently compromised.

In many ways the adult lives of the bishop's children of our study represent the successful transmission of the capital available to them by virtue of their upbringing. The vast majority had been to university and had been professionally trained in a particular field. Material advantages also extended into professional life, with many occupying lucrative, high status jobs in a variety of careers. Yet their orientation to their professional identities was distinctive, in many cases characterised by a commitment to the wider community and a tendency to measure professional output not by financial criteria but with reference to moral integrity. Indeed, this attitude is reflected in career choice, with over 50% pursuing a career devoted to the care or nurture of others, such as teaching, social work or medicine, and only 20% in private sector business or commerce. A resistance towards a materialistic framework and a commitment to civic mindedness is also reflected in the high percentage of clergy children heavily involved in voluntary work. Our results suggest that the children of Anglican bishops are far more likely to engage in voluntary work than the average British citizen, especially where religious/church-related work is concerned. In terms of religious identity, the picture is more ambiguous. Proportions of atheists and agnostics are reflective of the national picture; practically none, however, have gravitated into non-conformist, non-Christian or 'alternative' traditions. The majority (75%) maintain that they have a Christian identity of some kind, and almost half claim they attend church at least once each week. However, follow up interviews and a closer inspection of the questionnaire returns suggests a huge diversity of 'Christian' orientations, including nominal Anglicans, uncertain seekers open to a range of spiritual resources, civic minded liberal churchgoers committed to their local parish, and left-leaning evangelical activists. Modes of religious practice appear to be as diverse as the moral and religious positions from which they supposedly emerge.

A more illuminating analysis emerges when we examine this population of clergy children not in terms of static categories, but in terms of the development of their spiritual careers, a proposal in keeping with Verter's understanding of spiritual capital as a liquid resource, open to development and transformation into different forms, in light of changing life experiences. This approach, especially when facilitated by extensive narrative data gathered *via* interviews, allows for more interesting patterns to be identified, patterns suggestive of a negotiation of spiritual capital which is in large part a response to the ambiguous experience of being raised in a clerical household, as described above. The key factor here is that, within the clerical household, the boundaries of the worlds of work, religion and family are frequently and profoundly blurred, so that each field of life experience invades into another. This is most evident in the recollections of the clerical home: a bounded domestic space, frequently compromised by its use by non-family-members, be they parishioners, other clergy or church officials, as if it were a public space. It was at the same time a home, a place for the father's work, and a context for the dispensing of pastoral care

and spiritual guidance. This is an ambiguous legacy, and while some recall rich encounters with interesting and influential individuals, others focus on a sense of disorientation and alienation. Indeed, we may expect this blurring of boundaries to have been experienced as problematic, especially during formative years, when clergy children begin to learn that this arrangement is abnormal and counter to the dominant cultural trend. Indeed, as many have commented before, the predominant way in which religious life is managed in the UK is as a private matter, qualitatively distinguished and therefore separated from matters of professional life, and often from the home also.

Analysis of interview data suggests that many clergy children adopt a particular strategy in making sense of their current identities, focused on unravelling these boundaries and maintaining an arrangement that keeps them discrete. Thereby spiritual capital is negotiated in a way that harnesses its advantages, but within a life situation that maintains the home/religion/work boundaries these individuals have learnt as normal and desirable. For example, some respondents had sought to separate the notion of Christian faith from the institution of the Church of England. This allows them to account for their negative experiences during childhood as consequences of a flawed church rather than lay them at the door of Christianity as a whole. This also allows them to separate pressures on the family from Christianity itself, by associating them with professional pressures brought to bear on their father by the Church, thus freeing up Christianity as a palatable spiritual resource for appropriation in adult life and within the upbringing of their own children. Other respondents acknowledge the values they received because of their upbringing, and see a direct link to their father's vocation as a clergyman. They also embrace these values in their own lives, but make sense of their worth as moral, social or – in many cases – professional skills. They do their job as their father would do his job as a vicar, even though they are a corporate manager, teacher or civil servant. Hence, values are reconceived and rationalised as professional values, thus separating religion from professional life, while maintaining the spiritual capital acquired from being raised in a clerical household. Both of these instances serve as strategies for the negotiation of spiritual capital within the lives of individuals living in late modern Britain. In accordance with Verter's understanding, this conceives spiritual capital as a multi-faceted phenomenon, able to be transformed into other forms, but in dialogue with the boundaries established by early life experience.

Interestingly, some sons and daughters of Anglican bishops have, by contrast, taken the family model associated with their parents further. That is, they have adopted a more radical integration of the spheres of religion, work and family life, often in order to express a more counter-cultural form of Christianity. Some of these cases are conservative evangelical males who have rebelled against the more liberal Anglicanism of their fathers, or daughters of bishops who have married clergymen themselves. An inversion of spiritual capital is here in evidence, as individuals use their father's orientation to the church as a foil for their own emerging faith stance. One respondent's comments were particularly illuminating, suggesting his sense of independence as an individual and as a Christian depended on him defining himself in contradistinction from his father.

“...my own faith was formed in an evangelical stable in a way my dad's wasn't, and really that became the way I think [I] expressed my own

independence through my teenaged years. Dad and I were at our least close during my teens, and I became quite involved in the charismatic movement and became quite militant in my evangelicalism, and really thought my dad's liberal Catholicism was worthless. But my own sense of my values and my self as a Christian person were very much clearer for me..."

It is important to note that a process of resolution has since occurred between this individual and his father, so that his 'rebellion' may be interpreted as a necessary but temporary episode on a longer spiritual journey. Most importantly, as with many of the other cases we examined, a distinctive sense of identity was seen as emerging from a successful negotiation of the spiritual capital inherited, whether this is through a separation of life spheres, or by a more thoroughgoing integration of them.

Conclusion

To conceive of spirituality in terms of 'spiritual capital', as subject to the acquisition, development, maintenance and transmission of cultural resources, brings with it numerous advantages. It highlights issues of power inequality as shaped by, but not restricted to, religious institutions; it facilitates an analysis of religious identity in terms of a spiritual career, which pays greater attention to the flow of influences and resources acquired through the life course; it offers a theoretical way into the complex issue of non-institutional religion, as a matter of resources positioned within overlapping networks; and, most clearly within the context of the present study, it allows a clearer picture to be painted of religion as an inter-generational phenomenon.

While deploying the concept of 'spiritual capital' within the context of the 'Clergy and British Society' project revealed some valuable insights into its utility, it also exposed some theoretical limitations. Spiritual capital highlights the advantages of approaching religious identity in longitudinal terms, i.e. as a process of development and change, and subtle adjustment within the context of individual biographies and draws our attention to the exchange of resources that invest power and influence. In this it invites particular research methodologies, and an examination of narrative in the construction of identity may be a fruitful way forward. However, our application of the concept also exposed certain lessons for the future. Not least, the example of clergy children highlights the importance of allowing that spiritual capital may not always be a uniformly or persistently positive resource for those who possess it. This is a useful illustration of how Verter differs from rational choice theorists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, who in their treatment of religious capital refer to "mastery of and attachment to a particular religious culture" (Stark and Finke, 2000: 120-25). Verter (2003: 158) is right to criticise this model. It implies a fixed and orthodox appropriation of religious tradition; if one assumes mastery of a religious culture as a criterion for measuring religious capital, one indirectly aligns oneself with the authoritative version of that culture that emerges; alternative readings become at best shortfalls and at worst heresies. The example of clergy children brings to light the fact that that which is conceived as capital – as a resource for deployment – can be appropriated as a negative influence, so that emerging strategies for action and non-action are counter-reactions, grounded in discontentment rather than positive empowerment. Spiritual capital can be a source of struggle as well as a means to strength.

A second lesson relates to a shortcoming of capital theory generally, one that was exposed during the course of our project, and that relates to its in-built assumptions about human behaviour, assumptions that are heightened when set within Verter's vision of a deregulated late modernity. While Bourdieu talks of various forms of capital as residing in collective bodies, he does not speak of how capital may be deployed positively in the construction of them, in the forging of moral identities and in the ongoing development of moral communities. Capital, as our project discovered, is an essential factor not just in individual advancement, but in the emergence and building of communities through genuine commitment to a greater order. (The significant commitment of the clergy children of our study to civic-mindedness and voluntary action may be an instructive example here). Capital does have the capacity to facilitate a positive expression beyond self-interest, and I would venture to say that this possibility includes, but extends beyond Putnam's claims about social capital as a social good. One way forward might point to the insights of the symbolic exchange theory ultimately derived from the classic sociology of Marcel Mauss (Mauss, 1954). This approach to social life, especially as recently developed in the work of people like Jacques Godbout (Godbout and Caille, 1998), is also premised on the idea of exchange, but acknowledges the importance of the quality of relationships through which this exchange takes place, and suggests that the act of giving is as important as the advantage enjoyed by receiving particular commodities. A synthesis of these ideas generates some creative possibilities in the development of spiritual capital theory, and this argument is explored further in the volume emerging from the 'Clergy and British Society' project (Davies and Guest, 2006).

Aside from the slipperiness and unanswered questions, 'spiritual capital' demands consideration, if only because it opens up some age-old questions inherited long ago from classical sociology. Just as spirituality depends upon institutionalisation for its continuance and consolidation into a 'tradition', so in the context of late modernity, does this 'spirituality' require a means of breaking out of its traditions in order to infiltrate assumed secular domains of social life. In other words, to explore 'spirituality' is to address the age-old Weberian tension between the originating experiences of religion and its institutions, but to engage with the problem in reverse. That is, to take another Weberian model, we are not concerned with how charisma is routinised, but in how charisma breaks out of institutions in ways which pervade wider spheres of influence. Moreover, the emerging 'spiritual capital' is not a vague and rootless entity, following a peripatetic and voyeuristic tour amongst the various cynical outlets of the spiritual marketplace. Rather, it is a liquid flow of ideas and values that, while uprooted from their original institutional context, are nevertheless shaped by the traditions out of which they emerged, traditions that still steer their course, mould their practical expression and infuse the language in which they are affirmed, silenced or challenged.

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¹ There is evidence to suggest that a more general, multi-referential use of 'capital' was a part of social scientific discourse at least as early as the first decades of the twentieth century. For example, in his

discussion of the nature of 'social categories' within the Introduction to the *Elementary Forms*, first published in 1912, Emile Durkheim makes reference to 'intellectual' and 'material' capital without feeling the need to offer any further explanation or definition of terms (Durkheim, 1995: 18).

² For a detailed account of the theoretical history of social capital within the social sciences, see Woolcock, 1998.

³ In her innovative sociological analysis of contemporary religion, Daniele Hervieu-Leger makes a similar point about the Durkheimian distinction between the sacred and the profane which, she suggests, distorts the Christian distinction between the temporal and the spiritual into a universal aspect of all religious phenomena (Hervieu-Leger, 2000: 48-51).

⁴ While achieving popular appeal in recent years, the use of the term 'spiritual capital' to refer to a source of positive social energy can be traced back at least as far as the nineteenth century. Woolcock points to the case of German social critic Adam Muller, whose opposition to Adam Smith's materialist economics included a conviction that a community's stock of "spiritual capital" was instrumental in determining levels of economic prosperity. Muller's understanding of spiritual capital appears to have been broad-based, incorporating cultural values and the "organic unity of society and state" (quoted in Woolcock, 1998: 199). His opposition to free trade suggests a conception that focuses on church and society as an integrated force for moral restraint, necessary in an equitable and just economic system.

⁵ An alternative take on spiritual capital is offered by Robert Wuthnow, who identifies it as a sub-species of social capital. For Wuthnow, spiritual capital distinguishes "activities that have a specific religious emphasis or that are explicitly concerned with relating people to the sacred or divine..." (Wuthnow, 2000: 128) Most, but not all, of the examples Wuthnow cites are collective activities, such as discussing religious texts, group prayer or group study, and all are interpreted as a means of generating spiritual capital.